

O'zapft is!

Annual Oktoberfest celebration brings Bavarian tradition home

By Melanie Casey
Editor

"Eins ... zwei ... 'g'sufft! Prost!"

For those of a legal age, this was an invitation to hoist a stein (or, for some, the traditional liter-sized glass known as a *Mass*) and partake in some of Germany's finest *biere* during the installation's annual Oktoberfest celebration.

The five-day event, which started Sept. 17 at the Fort Meade Pavilion and ended Sunday, featured more than 20 carnival rides along with traditional German music, dancing, food and, of course, beer.

"I'm amazed at the size this year," said Ramona Vazquez, who was on hand Saturday night manning a Coast Guard Spouses' Association tent and enjoying the festivities. "It's like a county fair. There are different age groups and diversity. It's really great."

This marked the eighth year the festival has been held on Fort Meade, said Beth Havlik, chief of marketing



(From left) Nica Clark, Tracy Cargle, Michael Cargle and Chelsi Cargle, 4, take a curious peek at a group of brightly painted hermit crabs at the Oktoberfest celebration Friday at the Fort Meade Pavilion.

and advertising for the Directorate of Family and Morale, Welfare and Recreation at Fort Meade.

Based on beverage and carnival ticket sales, FMWR estimates more than 10,000 people attended the event, Havlik said.

An exact number is difficult to determine, she added, since admission was free and visitors could enter the grounds from a variety of directions.

Carnival rides beckoned both the timid and brazen and included a giant slide, Ferris wheel, carousel and Kamikaze, while games and activities for all ages lined the midway.

But for many, a fest is not a fest without food — and Fort Meade's celebration delivered. Cotton candy, funnel cakes, fried Oreos and candy apples were offered alongside traditional German fare such as bratwurst, sauerkraut, schinzel and potato salad. In addition, culinary artist and Master Chef Edwin Scholly returned to the fest this year to offer daily cooking demonstrations.

Inside the fest tent, which was decorated in the traditional Bavarian colors of pale blue and white, several types of authentic German beer were on tap.

"Sitting in the tent reminded me of an authentic fest in Germany," said Installation Commander Col. Daniel L. Thomas, who tapped the keg Friday evening. "DFMWR did a great job in bringing the Germany experience to us here."

The entertainment was also authentic. The Edelweiss Band, Washington German dance group, Heidi & Helmut Echo Band and Dancers, and Das Alekamenaden Band took to the stage during the event to offer genuine German festival fun.

New to this year's celebration was the *Standort-kommandant* Cup competition, which was held opening night. The unit with the most participation that night took home a trophy; free use of a picnic site at Burba Lake; free lunch coupons for The Courses Fort Meade; coupons for free bowling

at The Lanes; and a framed company photo for the Wall of Fame at next year's Oktoberfest. This year's winner was Dental Activity Fort Meade, followed by Headquarters Command.

In addition to food, fun and entertainment, the fest offered a venue for a few of Fort Meade's clubs to raise money and publicize their organizations.

The Fort Meade Officers' Wives' Club's Ways and Means committee sold hand-crafted signs to raise money for administrative costs as well as tickets to the group's annual Basket Bingo event, said Jennifer Wilson, OWC president. "Sales are good," she added, as daughters Avery, 4 and Malory, 2 kept busy.

Next door in the Enlisted Spouses' Club tent, ESC Ways and Means Chair JoAnn Mitchell distributed information about the club and offered children an opportunity to craft a keepsake bookmark. The Coast Guard Spouses' Association was on hand to distribute information as well.

A Bavarian tradition

In Bavaria, Oktoberfest is held the two weeks prior to the first Sunday in October. Initially, the event served as a celebration of the Oct. 12, 1810 marriage of Bavarian Crown Prince Ludwig to Princess Therese. Each year thereafter, citizens were invited to celebrate the couple's anniversary, and Oktoberfest was born.

According to information on www.vistawide.com, the celebration was moved back to September "to allow for better weather conditions." The annual Munich festival is now the world's largest, with more than 16 million visitors every year.

Thomas, who recently attended another local Oktoberfest, said the Fort Meade celebration "was far superior. Any time our team provides an experience better than that provided by a private enterprise, it's a job well done."

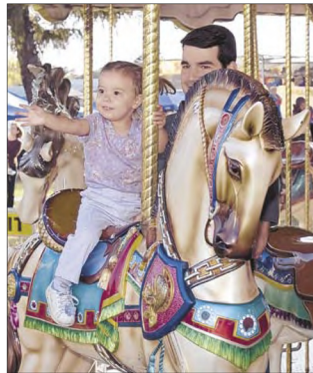


PHOTO BY GEORGE HASEGEORE



PHOTO BY PFC ALI HANSEN

ABOVE: Aaron West, of Cape St. Claire, steadies daughter Olivia, 2, as she waves to her mother while enjoying the carousel ride at the Oktoberfest celebration on Friday. More than 10,000 people visited this year's celebration.

LEFT: Dressed in traditional German *Lederhosen*, members of the Heidi & Helmut Echo Band and Dancers take a moment to enjoy the Oktoberfest celebration Saturday evening. The five-day event offered authentic Bavarian food and entertainment.